

## INTRO:

**NARRATOR:** Welcome to “Taking the Next Step: Helping Students with Disabilities Transition from High School to College or the Workforce”.

*Transition*, the topic of this CD-ROM, is the formal process, beginning at age 16, of helping the student with disabilities move successfully into the adult world. It is a process that guides a student along a continuum from self-doubt to self-advocacy and from dependency to independence. A successful high school to college or workforce transition must actively involve the student, parents, educators, adult service providers, business leaders, and the community!

Whether you are a student considering attending college or entering the workforce after high school, a parent, or an educator, **TAKING THE NEXT STEP**, will provide you with important information on your roles and responsibilities. It will also supply you with resources and referrals to services to ensure that you will not have to navigate this transition process alone.

The passage from high school to college or work is difficult for most students—it’s an anxiety-producing time. And it can be a lot harder for students with disabilities. More and more students with disabilities are attending college or entering the workforce, and some are decidedly better prepared than others.

There are vast differences between what high schools do, what colleges will do, and what employers are required to do to assist students and employees with disabilities. The extent to which students have been prepared for these differences largely predicts their early success or failure.

Most of these differences can be found in the law.

The legislation governing kindergarten through high school is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. The IDEA requires schools to identify students with disabilities and to provide free appropriate public education, often involving program modifications, to assure the student equal opportunity for **success**.

It is not uncommon for students, parents and high school personnel to assume that these same types of services will automatically be available in college. This is **NOT** the case.

The laws effecting higher education as well as the workplace are Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act and the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act. These laws are “civil rights” legislation, which protect qualified persons with disabilities from discrimination based upon disability.

As a result of these two laws, all public and private colleges are **only** obligated to provide equal access along with reasonable and appropriate accommodations for students who self disclose their disability. Colleges ensure **access**; not necessarily **success**.

Under these laws, employers may not discriminate in their hiring practices based on a disability. They must also work with the individual employee who self-discloses their

disability by providing reasonable accommodations to assist them in successfully doing their job.

From kindergarten through high school, students with disabilities have relied on their parents and schools to identify the disability and provide the necessary assistance. At college or on the job, only **one** person is ultimately responsible for these issues—the individual with the disability.

## **STUDENT**

As a student with a disability, your school has provided you with unique services during your education. These services may have included specialized learning strategies, classroom or testing accommodations, or providing training on assistive technology.

Students who receive special education services follow a carefully designed plan called an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. Among other things, an IEP lists your strengths, special needs and services, and the providers of these services.

A team of people working together on your behalf develops your IEP. This team must include you, your parents, teachers and a school administrator. Often other people attend, such as staff from Vocational Rehabilitation, especially if they provide or will provide needed services to help you reach your post high-school goals.

Your IEP team meets at least once a year or more often if necessary. Your “custom-made” education plan follows you as you move from grade to grade.

When you turn 16, transition planning will officially begin with your IEP team. You will be invited and are **encouraged** to attend your IEP meetings. From then on, your IEP must include a transition plan on how you will reach your post-high school goals and dreams as **you** envision them. From that point on, your IEP becomes less of an annual plan and more of a roadmap for your life over the next several years—into young adulthood.

This is why it is vitally important for you to attend your IEP meetings and play an active role. You need to be present in order to represent your preferences and needs. After all, **you** want to plan your future-- not have someone else do it.

If you haven't already, there are several things you can do **right now** to get involved with your IEP:

- Find out when your next IEP meeting will be held and make plans to attend.
- Review your current IEP with your parents and teachers and make sure you understand what it means.
- Make a list of the things you would like to do after you graduate from high school. Include your personal, as well as your academic goals.
- Know which courses you need in order to earn a high school diploma and meet college admission standards and then make sure these courses are part of your IEP.
- Finally, be sure to ask questions at your IEP meetings when you don't understand something. You should also work your way up to **leading** or **co-leading** your own IEP meetings with your teacher.

If you have plans to attend college, good for you! The key to effective high school to college transition planning is to begin early. Here is a helpful timetable:

- Beginning in your **freshman** year, work on developing your social and interpersonal communication skills, as well as independent-living skills such as shopping, cooking and money management.
- With parent and counselor input, select classes that will prepare you for college. This might include classes such as word processing, public speaking and study skills. You may want to take almost every computer class offered—technology and computers are a real plus for college students with a disability!
- Explore career options with guidance counselors and teachers during your freshman year.
- **In high school you should learn all you can about the nature of your disability and how it impacts your learning.**
- During your **sophomore** year, and each year thereafter, it's a good idea to review your high school transcript and make sure you are completing the courses necessary for high school graduation and college entrance.
- Make an effort to participate in extracurricular and community activities. Consider taking on a summer job or a volunteer position following the school year.
- Register for the Pre-SAT or Pre-ACT, known as the PSAT and PLAN, and request test accommodations, if appropriate.
- Early in your **junior** year, make a list of colleges you might like to attend. With parents, teachers, counselors and friends, discuss how each college fits your goals. Visit the colleges' web sites. Later in the year, visit 3 to 5 colleges. Schedule meetings with the Admissions office, Financial Aid office, and Disability Support Office.
- Register, prepare for and take the ACT or SAT (with test accommodations if requested) during your junior year.
- In the spring, contact the regional vocational rehabilitation office who will determine whether or not you are eligible for VR services. If you are found eligible, VR may be able to assist you with some of your college educational needs.
- During your **senior** year, submit applications for admission and financial aid to your colleges of choice. Ask teachers, counselors and employers to write letters of recommendation for admission and scholarships.
- If you are going to disclose your disability to the college, submit documentation directly to the campus Disability Services Office.
- Continue to visit colleges with your parents. Don't forget to check buildings and classrooms for accessibility, if necessary. You may also need to look into housing and transportation and their accessibility.

Remember, colleges are not under the same obligations as high schools to provide you with services based on your disability. Your college education won't be handed to you.

If you want accommodations in college, you will have to ask for them yourself! That's why as you prepare for college, it's important for you to become a **self-advocate**. Self-advocacy is the art of speaking up for yourself and your needs. It requires self-confidence, self-knowledge and assertiveness.

Learn about your civil rights and responsibilities under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Links to numerous informational web sites are contained in the “Resources” section of this CD.

Develop independent living skills and take responsibility for your actions.

Most of all, don’t be a bystander when it comes to developing the transitional component of your IEP. Be a player!

## **PARENT**

As the parent of a student with a disability wishing to pursue college, you want to do all you can to help your son or daughter make the transition from the structured environment of high school to the more demanding world of higher education.

From the time your son or daughter began receiving special education services, an Individualized Education Program, or IEP has guided their education. You have probably been an active participant on the IEP team.

Once your son or daughter turns 16, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, requires the IEP team to begin transition planning. From that point on, the IEP should begin to resemble a roadmap guiding your son or daughter’s entry into the adult world.

Once transition begins, the student must be invited to IEP meetings so they may practice self-advocacy skills as they represent their own preferences, interests, needs and dreams. Since your son or daughter has chosen college as their post-secondary goal, nearly every element of the transition plan should further that goal. For example, the high school course of study should ensure timely high school graduation and entry into college.

Besides the student and their parents, the IEP transition team involves the participation of teachers, counselors, administrators, adult service providers, employers, higher education personnel and others. Representatives of adult agencies, which may provide the student services while in college, can and should be invited to IEP meetings in the junior year.

You have a right to invite them. A smoother transition to these services will result if these providers are included in the transition process as early as possible.

If your son or daughter is unable to attend an IEP meeting, you can make sure their desires, goals and interests are well represented.

After all, you bring to the table a wealth of information about your son or daughter, including their medical history, insights into their behavior at home and in the community, and knowledge of how their disability affects their everyday life.

Try to do everything in your power to **encourage** your son or daughter’s participation in IEP meetings. Preparing for meetings together offers you and your son or daughter quality time during which you can help them solidify their goals and aspirations.

Your son or daughter's involvement in the transition process gives them practice in speaking up for themselves—a skill they will need and value as a young adult. Remember that the IEP will not follow them to college.

In order to receive services and accommodations at the college level, your son or daughter must ASK for them. That's why it is essential for your son or daughter to be able to describe their disability along with the types of accommodations and support they need to be successful in an academic environment—information they would likely know well if they were involved in the IEP process!

In the college setting, under federal law, parents are no longer allowed automatic access to student information concerning their disabilities, accommodations or academic progress. This may be unsettling for students who are accustomed to strong parental support and intervention on their behalf. College students are treated as legal adults in charge of their own affairs.

However, students can sign a release allowing parent access to academic records and/or financial records for a specified period of time. Contact the college registrar for details.

While parents of college-age students may no longer have the same authority they once had in their son or daughter's lives, they can still offer much-needed guidance, support and wisdom. Parents are used to being **advocates** for their high school son or daughter. With young adults in college, the parental role changes to advisor-mentor.

Ultimately, the young adult must learn to solve his or her own problems. Parents can teach and exemplify problem-solving skills, which include information gathering and weighing options. Throughout their high school career, you should make every effort to involve your son or daughter in activities that promote independence and help them self-advocate.

The key to effective high school to college transition planning is to begin early. Here is a helpful timetable:

- Throughout high school, help your son or daughter select classes that will prepare them for college. This might include classes such as word processing, public speaking, and study skills.
- Also help them understand the nature of their disability and how it impacts their learning.
- During their **sophomore** year, and each year thereafter, review with your son or daughter their high school transcripts to make sure they are completing the necessary courses for high school graduation and college entrance.
- Stress the importance of participating in extracurricular and community activities.
- Early in their **junior** year, have your son or daughter make a list of colleges they might like to attend and check out their web sites. Later in the year, visit 3 to 5 colleges. Schedule meetings with the Admissions office, Financial Aid office, and Disability Services Office. Ask your son or daughter to make the appointments themselves.
- In the spring, contact the regional vocational rehabilitation office. They will determine whether or not your son or daughter is eligible for VR services. If they

are found to be eligible, VR may be able to assist them with some of their college educational needs.

- During their **senior** year, your son or daughter will need to submit applications for admission and financial aid to their colleges of choice.
- Finally, continue to visit colleges. As you investigate each one, depending upon your son or daughter's needs, you may need to look into housing and transportation and the accessibility of both.

For parents concerned about their son or daughter with disabilities adjusting to college and making their own decisions, there are helpful materials available in bookstores, libraries and on the internet. Talk to the high school counselors, members of your IEP team and personnel at the college disability services office to get more information.

## EDUCATOR

Statistics show that more and more young adults with disabilities are attending college after high school. Hopefully this is an indication that we have found more effective ways to help students realize their true potential.

In order to help students with disabilities successfully transition to college, educators need to strongly convey two key concepts:

- First, the laws governing students with disabilities in college are very different from those in high school
- Second, in the college setting, the **student** is ultimately responsible for their education and accessing accommodations.

It's extremely important for educators to help parents understand early on that their college-bound son or daughter with a disability will no longer be covered by the IDEA legislation. This single reality generates a whole list of important issues that families must comprehend. For example:

- In college there is no IEP and the services and accommodations that were provided to the student in high school do NOT automatically continue in college. In fact, in college, it is the student's responsibility, not the school's, to identify and disclose the disability if he or she wants services or accommodations.
- Families should also be aware that colleges are under no obligation to provide academic modifications—only academic accommodations. Families should comprehend the difference between the two: **Accommodations** are provisions made in how a student accesses or demonstrates learning, and **Modifications** are changes in what a student is expected to learn and demonstrate. Essentially, this means that colleges have the right to maintain standards. Higher education is about access, not success.

A college is NOT required to reduce or waive essential requirements of a course or program. For example, they **may** allow a different testing procedure, but they are **not** required to alter the test content.

These are but a few of the issues surrounding the federal laws ensuring equal access to college by students with disabilities.

The best advice educators can give students and their families is to know their legal rights and responsibilities, as well as the college's. This includes familiarizing

themselves with the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act.

Links to numerous informational web sites are contained in the “Resources” section of this CD.

Additionally, families should be encouraged to begin dialoguing with the college’s disabilities support services office well **before** high school graduation.

From kindergarten through high school, students with disabilities are used to relying on their parents and school to do things for them. Once in college, they’re very much on their own! Consequently, the skills most needed by the college freshman are those leading toward self-advocacy. Educators involved in transition can do much to nurture self-advocacy and self-determination in the high school student:

- For example, students should be encouraged to be active members of their IEP teams. Ideally, they should be leading portions of their team meetings before they graduate from high school.
- Educators can also connect students with courses that will help them succeed in college—study skills courses, for example, or AP courses, which might give them a taste of college-level work.
- Educators can help students know their disability, the functional limitations of it and the necessary accommodations.
- It’s also the role of educators to help students select appropriate assistive technology, with the goal of increasing their independence as well as their participation in life-enhancing activities.

Vocational Rehabilitation may be able to contribute to these goals as well—students receiving special education services should be referred to VR by the spring semester of their junior year.

Most importantly, educators should remember to build on a student’s strengths.

Typically, the focus at IEP meetings has been on a student’s deficits. At team meetings, we should highlight the things students can do with or without accommodations. We can praise their accomplishments and then discuss their needs, and most importantly, how to work with the adverse effects of their disability.

If we truly want to help students with disabilities successfully transition to college, we have to allow them to do things for themselves, and even make mistakes when appropriate. To paraphrase a familiar quote: “The most important thing parents and educators can teach young adults is how to get along without them!”

**STUDENT** As a student with a disability, your school has provided you with unique services during your education. These services may have included specialized learning strategies, classroom or testing accommodations, or providing training on assistive technology.

Students who receive special education services follow a carefully designed plan called an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. Among other things, an IEP lists your strengths, special needs and services, and the providers of these services.

A team of people working together on your behalf develops your IEP. This team must include you, your parents, teachers and a school administrator. Often other people attend, such as staff from Vocational Rehabilitation, especially if they provide or will provide needed services to help you complete your education and reach your postsecondary employment goals.

Your IEP team meets at least once a year or more often if necessary. Your “custom-made” education plan follows you as you move from grade to grade.

When you turn 16, transition planning will officially begin with your IEP team. You will be invited and are **encouraged** to attend your IEP meetings.

From that point on, your IEP must include a transition plan on how you will reach your post-high school goals and dreams as **you** envision them. Your IEP becomes less of an annual plan and more of a roadmap for your life over the next several years—into young adulthood.

This is why it is vitally important for you to attend your IEP meetings and play an active role. You need to be present in order to represent your preferences and needs. After all, **you** want to plan your future-- not have someone else do it.

If you haven't already, there are several things you can do **right now** to get involved with your IEP:

- Find out when your next IEP meeting will be held and make plans to attend.
- Review your current IEP with your parents and teachers and make sure you understand what it means.
- Make a list of the things you would like to do after you graduate from high school. Include your personal, as well as career goals.
- Know which courses you need in order to earn a high school diploma. Make sure these courses are part of your IEP.
- Finally, be sure to ask questions at your IEP meetings when you don't understand something. You should also work your way up to **leading** or **co-leading** your own IEP meetings with your teacher.

The key to effective high school to workforce transition planning is to begin early. Here is a helpful timetable:

Beginning in your **freshman** year, work on developing your social and interpersonal skills. Often referred to as “**Soft Skills**”, these qualities or attributes are essential to success in the workforce today. Some examples of soft skills are:

Personal Qualities which include:

- ✓ responsibility
- ✓ self-esteem
- ✓ sociability
- ✓ self-management
- ✓ Integrity and honesty

Interpersonal Skills which include:



- ✓ participates as a member of the Team
- ✓ teaches others
- ✓ serves Clients / Customers
- ✓ exercises leadership
- ✓ negotiates and
- ✓ works with cultural diversity

With parent and counselor input, select classes that will prepare you for effectively entering the workforce. You may want to take almost every computer class offered—technology and computer knowledge is a real plus!

- Explore career options with career counselors, guidance counselors and teachers during your freshman year. With a career or guidance counselor, participate in valid and reliable interest testing to ensure that the career you are looking at is achievable and is something that you are passionate about.
- In high school you should learn all you can about the nature of your disability and how it impacts your learning.
- During your **sophomore** year and each year thereafter it's a good idea to review your high school transcript and make sure you are completing the courses necessary for high school graduation. Continue to do this with a career or guidance counselor. Also, continue to take valid and reliable interest testing to ensure that the career you have chosen still interests you and is attainable.
- Make an effort to participate in extracurricular and community activities. Consider taking on a summer job or volunteer position following the school year.
- If you receive social security benefits (SSI or SSDI) and wish to while in high school or later, now is a good time to meet with a benefits planner to assist you with understanding the impact of earned income on SSA benefits and healthcare. There are several SSA work incentive programs available to high school students who wish to work. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can direct you to your nearest benefits planner.
- Even though you may not currently be planning to attend college, you should register, prepare for and take the Pre-SAT or the Pre-ACT, also known as the PSAT and PLAN, and request test accommodations, if appropriate.
- Conduct research on the North Dakota labor market, companies you would like to work for and places you would like to live. You need to understand what employers are looking for in their employees and what their businesses do, particularly in the work environment and how it may impact your disability.
- Prepare to take the ACT or SAT test, with accommodations if needed. By taking the exam now, you are placing yourself in a while in high school or later, now is a good time to meet with a benefits planner to assist you with understanding the impact of earned income on SSA benefits and healthcare. There are several SSA work incentive programs available to high school students who wish to work. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can direct you to your nearest benefits planner.
- Even though you may not currently be planning to attend college, you should register, prepare for and take the Pre-SAT or the Pre-ACT, also known as the PSAT and PLAN, and request test accommodations, if appropriate.
- Conduct research on the North Dakota labor market, companies you would like to work for and places you would like to live. You need to understand what employers are looking for in their employees and what their businesses do, particularly in the work environment and how it may impact your disability.

- Prepare to take the ACT or SAT test, with accommodations if needed. By taking the exam now, you are placing yourself in a position to attend college if your plans change
- In the spring of your junior year, contact the regional vocational rehabilitation office who will determine whether or not you are eligible for VR services. If you are found eligible, they may be able to assist you by working with you to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment, or IPE.

Remember, employers are not under the same obligations as high schools or colleges to provide you with services based on your disability.

The primary piece of legislation covering business owners and employers is the Americans with Disabilities Act, or ADA.

If you want accommodations from your employer, you will have to ask for them yourself! That's why as you prepare for employment, it's important for you to become a **self-advocate**. Self-advocacy is the art of speaking up for yourself and your needs. It requires self-confidence, self-knowledge and assertiveness.

It is imperative that you learn about your civil rights under the ADA including:

- Your role and responsibilities.
- The employer's roles and responsibilities.
- When and how to disclose your disability, if you need to.
- What is a reasonable accommodation and how to ask for it.

Links to numerous informational web sites are contained in the "Resources" section of this CD.

Know your disability and be able to describe exactly how it affects your ability to work.

In today's workforce, employers are looking for individuals who are reliable, dependable and willing to take responsibility for their actions. They want people who are team players, good natured and respectful. To be successful, you need to be one of those people!

## **PARENT**

As the parent of a student with a disability, you want to do all you can to help your son or daughter make the transition from the structured environment of high school to the challenging world of work.

From the time your son or daughter began receiving special education services, an Individualized Education Program, or IEP has guided their education. You have probably been an active participant on the IEP team.

Once your son or daughter turns 16, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, requires the IEP team to have a transition plan in place. From that point on, the IEP should begin to resemble a roadmap guiding your son or daughter's entry into the adult world.

The student must be invited to IEP meetings so that they may practice self-advocacy skills as they represent their own preferences, interests, needs and dreams. Since your son or daughter has chosen to enter the workforce as their post-secondary goal, the transition plan should further that goal.

In addition to the student and their parents, the IEP transition team involves the participation of teachers, counselors, administrators, adult service providers, employers, higher education personnel and others.

Representatives of adult agencies can and should be invited to IEP meetings in the junior year. You have a right to invite them. A smoother transition to these services will result if these providers are included in transition as early as possible.

If your son or daughter is unable to attend an IEP meeting, you can make sure their desires, goals and interests are well represented.

After all, you bring to the table a wealth of information about your son or daughter, including their medical history, insights into their behavior at home and in the community, and knowledge of how their disability affects their everyday life.

Try to do everything in your power to encourage your son or daughter's participation in IEP meetings.

Preparing for meetings together offers you and your son or daughter quality time during which you can help them solidify their goals and aspirations. Your son or daughter's involvement in the transition process gives them practice in speaking up for themselves—a skill they will need and value as a young adult.

Remember that the IEP will not follow them into the workforce

In order to receive accommodations from an employer, your son or daughter must ASK for them.

That's why it is essential for your son or daughter to be able to describe their disability along with the types of accommodations they need to be successful in a work environment--information they would likely know well if they were involved in the IEP process!

Ultimately, the young adult must learn to solve his or her own problems. Parents can teach and exemplify problem-solving skills, which include information gathering and weighing options.

Throughout their high school career, you should make every effort to involve your son or daughter in activities that promote independence and help them self-advocate.

The key to effective high school to work transition planning is to begin early. Here is a helpful timetable:

Throughout high school, help your son or daughter work on developing social and interpersonal skills. Often referred to as “**Soft Skills**”, these qualities or attributes are essential to success in the workforce today.

- Assist your son or daughter in working with the school's career or guidance counselor to select classes that will prepare them to effectively enter the workforce. They may want to take almost every computer class offered—technology and computer knowledge is a real plus!
- Your son or daughter should explore career options with career counselors, guidance counselors and teachers. With a career or guidance counselor, they should participate in **valid and reliable interest testing** to ensure that the career they are looking at is achievable and is something they are passionate about
- If your son or daughter receives social security benefits (SSI or SSDI) and works while in high school or intends to work later, now is a good time to meet with a benefits planner to assist you with understanding the impact of earned income on SSA benefits and healthcare. There are several SSA work incentive programs available to high school students who wish to work. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can direct you to a benefits planner.
- Also help them understand the nature of their disability and how it impacts their job selection and performance.
- During their **sophomore** year and each year thereafter it's a good idea to review your son or daughter's high school transcript with them to make sure they are completing the courses necessary for high school graduation. They should continue to do this with a career or guidance counselor and take valid and reliable interest testing to ensure that the career choice still interests them and is attainable.
- Stress the importance of participating in extracurricular and community activities. This involvement can lead to the development of a network of employer contacts.
- Your son or daughter should conduct research on the North Dakota labor market, companies they would like to work for and places they would like to live. Students need to understand what these businesses do as well as what the employers are looking for in their employees. It is also important to learn about the work environment and how it may impact your son or daughter's disability.
- In the spring of their **junior year**, contact the regional vocational rehabilitation office who will determine whether or not your son or daughter is eligible for VR services. If found eligible, VR may be able to assist by working with your son or daughter to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment, or IPE.

For parents concerned about their son or daughter with disabilities adjusting to the challenging world of work and making their own decisions, there are helpful materials available in bookstores, libraries and on the internet. Talk to the high school counselors, members of your IEP team and community business leaders for more information.

Most importantly, be supportive and be a mentor. Show your son or daughter how to succeed in employment by being a good example.

### **CAREER COUNSELOR and EDUCATOR**

While many young adults with disabilities are attending college after high school, we need to remember that not all students want to go to college.

Some are choosing to enter the workforce directly from high school.

In order to help these students successfully transition to today's work environment, career and guidance counselors, along with educators, need to inform students with disabilities of key differences between the world of education and the world of work:

- First, the laws governing individuals with disabilities in employment are very different from those in high school. It is extremely important for career/guidance counselors and educators to help parents understand early on that their son or daughter with a disability will no longer be covered by the IDEA legislation once they enter the workforce.
- In the work environment, the **individual** is ultimately responsible for their work performance and requesting reasonable accommodations.
- There is no IEP and the services and accommodations that were provided to the student in high school do NOT automatically continue in employment. In fact, it is the individual's responsibility, not the employers, to identify and disclose the disability if he or she wants a reasonable accommodation.

The best advice career/guidance counselors and educators can give students and their families is to know their legal rights and responsibilities. This includes familiarizing themselves with the provisions of the 1990 Americans With Disabilities Act.

Links to numerous informational web sites are contained in the "Resources" section of this CD.

Once a student enters the workforce, they must become their own best advocate! Consequently, the skills most needed by the future employee are those leading toward self-advocacy.

For students who receive social security benefits (SSI or SSDI) and wish to work while in high school or later, a benefits planner can assist with understanding the impact of earned income on SSA benefits and healthcare. There are several SSA work incentive programs available to high school students who wish to work. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can direct you to your regional benefits planner.

Career/guidance counselors and educators involved in transition can do much to nurture self-advocacy and self-determination in the high school student:

- Students should be encouraged to be active members of their IEP teams. Ideally, they should be leading portions of their team meetings before they graduate from high school.
- Career/guidance counselors and educators can also connect students with courses that will help them succeed, particularly those courses that lead to the development of strong **soft skills** and an understanding of technology.
- **Valid and reliable career interest testing is essential.** Career/guidance counselors and educators should encourage students and parents to make interest testing a key part of the transition process.
- It is also essential that the student become involved in community and volunteer activities. This involvement can lead to a broader understanding of the working world and lead to the development of a valuable network of employer contacts.
- Career/guidance counselors and educators can help students know their disability, the functional limitations of it and the necessary accommodations.

- It's also the role of career/guidance counselors and educators to help students select appropriate assistive technology, with the goal of increasing their independence as well as their participation in life-enhancing activities.
- Vocational Rehabilitation may be able to contribute to these goals as well—students receiving transition services should be referred to VR by the spring semester of their junior year.
- Most importantly, career/guidance counselors and educators should remember to build on a student's strengths. At team meetings, highlight the things students can do with or without accommodations. Praise their accomplishments, discuss their needs as well as how to work with the adverse effects of their disability.

To help students with disabilities successfully transition into today's workforce, we have to be honest and candid with the student and parent. We have to present realistic options and help the student understand the differences between school and work.

Ultimately, the best thing you can do is be supportive!

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As you prepare for college or to enter the workforce, it's important that you understand your rights and responsibilities so that you may improve your chances for success. Here are some questions you should be asking, along with their answers:

1. **How do I receive disability services in college?** You need to contact the Disability Services office on campus to begin the application process.
2. **When do I need to apply for disability services?** You should apply as soon as you've been admitted to the college so that any accommodations you may need can be arranged.
3. **Do I have to inform a college that I have a disability?** No. However, if you want the school to provide any academic accommodation, you must identify yourself as having a disability. You should also let them know you have a disability if you want to ensure you'll be assigned to accessible facilities.
4. **Do colleges provide IEPs?** No. In college, the student is responsible for identifying themselves as an individual with a disability, providing disability documentation and requesting accommodations.
5. **Can I use my IEP or 504 plan for documentation of my disability?** Although an IEP or 504 plan may help identify services that have been effective for you, it is generally NOT sufficient documentation of your disability. This is because college places different demands on you than high school. Find out from the college what documentation they require.
6. **Will I receive the same services I received in high school?** Maybe. High schools are required to provide whatever service, help or accommodation you need to be successful. Colleges are required to provide "equal access to education" They provide this access by using **accommodations**, not necessarily services or extra help. For example, services such as word banks or reduced assignments probably wouldn't be offered in college because they don't provide modifications that would change educational standards.
7. **Who decides what accommodations I can use in college?** The Disability Services office at the college in which you are enrolled makes the final decision on accommodations. This is done after reviewing your disability documentation

and visiting with you. Accommodations are based on how the disability interferes with access to the educational environment and course curriculum.

8. **Do I have to pay for my accommodations?** No. It's the college's responsibility to provide reasonable accommodations to eligible students.
9. **Can I receive a failing grade for a college class in which I am receiving accommodations?** Yes. Accommodations ensure "access", not necessarily *success*. It is still your responsibility to attend classes, complete assignments, study for exams, and participate in projects and activities.
10. **Will the Disabilities Service Office provide services like helping me get ready for the school day?** No. Services or equipment needed to assist a person with daily living activities are the responsibility of the individual.
11. **What is a reasonable accommodation?** A reasonable accommodation is a change or adjustment in a work or school site, program, or job that makes it possible for an otherwise qualified employee or student with a disability to perform the duties or tasks required.
12. **Is an employer required to provide reasonable accommodation when I apply for a job?** Yes. Applicants, as well as employees, are entitled to reasonable accommodation.
13. **Should I tell my employer that I have a disability?** If you think you will need a reasonable accommodation in order to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions, you should inform the employer that an accommodation will be needed. Employers are required to provide reasonable accommodation only for the physical or mental limitations of a qualified individual with a disability of which they are aware. Generally, it is the responsibility of the employee to inform the employer that an accommodation is needed.
14. **Do I have to pay for a needed reasonable accommodation?** No. The ADA requires that the employer provide the accommodation unless to do so would impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business. .
15. **Can an employer terminate my employment due to my disability?** No. However, your employment may be terminated if you cannot perform essential job functions which are the minimum required duties and abilities necessary to perform the tasks of the job.
16. **Can an employer lower my salary or pay me less than other employees doing the same job because I need a reasonable accommodation?** No. An employer cannot make up the cost of providing a reasonable accommodation by lowering your salary or paying you less than other employees in similar positions.
17. **Does an employer have to make non-work areas used by employees, such as cafeterias, lounges, or employer-provided transportation accessible to people with disabilities?** Yes. The requirement to provide reasonable accommodation covers all services, programs, and non-work facilities provided by the employer. If making an existing facility accessible would be an undue hardship, the employer must provide a comparable facility that will enable a person with a disability to enjoy benefits and privileges of employment similar to those enjoyed by other employees, unless to do so would be an undue hardship.
18. **If an employer has several qualified applicants for a job, is the employer required to select a qualified applicant with a disability over other applicants without a disability?** No. The ADA does not require that an employer hire an applicant with a disability over other applicants because the

person has a disability. The ADA only prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability.

- 19. Can an employer refuse to hire me because he believes that it would be unsafe, because of my disability, for me to work with certain machinery required to perform the essential functions of the job?** The ADA permits an employer to refuse to hire an individual if he or she poses a direct threat to the health or safety of herself or others. A direct threat means a significant risk of substantial harm. .
- 20. Can an employer offer a health insurance policy that excludes coverage for pre-existing conditions?** Yes. The ADA does not affect pre-existing condition clauses contained in health insurance policies even though such clauses may adversely affect employees with disabilities more than other employees.